

The Book of Nehemiah
Chapter 5
“Life, Liberty & the Pursuit of Happiness!”

> Six Keys to Wise Leadership:

Key #1 - *A wise leader listens (v1-5)*

> Listen to the problems amongst the people it may sound familiar:

(v2) Too much population, not enough food.

(v3) Higher prices (inflation) caused greater debt service (mortgaging land, houses, etc.).

(v4) High taxes (April 15th is coming!)

(v5) High interest rates could not be paid, thus they and their children were forced into slavery.

What is the real problem? By listening to the people Nehemiah recognizes that the government and society had become greedy, corrupt, and heartless.

Key #2 - *A wise leader re-acts righteously (v6-9)*

(v6) Nehemiah’s anger was motivated through God’s righteousness. J. Oswald Sanders writes, “Great leaders who have turned the tide in days of national and spiritual declension have been men who could get angry at the injustices and abuses that dishonor God and enslave men. It was righteous anger against the heartless slave traders that caused *William Wilberforce* to move heaven and earth for the emancipation of slaves.” **Remember Jesus in Matt 21:12-13** - *Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"*

(v7) Nehemiah took time to think. When you get angry do take time to think? James 1:19-20 - *So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*

(v8-9) After serious thought Nehemiah rebukes the nobles and rulers in three areas based upon the Word of God:

1st - “usury” which is the charging of interest on a loan to a fellow Jew. The Word of God says in Ex 22:25 - *"If you lend money to any of My people who are poor among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest."* **Deut 23:19-20** - *"You shall not charge interest to your brother -- interest on money or food or anything that is lent out at interest. To a foreigner you may charge interest, but to your brother you shall not charge interest, that the LORD your God may bless you in all to which you set your hand in the land which you are entering to possess."*

2nd - “enslaving your brethren” - Lev 25:35-40 - *"If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. Take no usury or interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you. You shall not lend him your money for usury, nor lend him your food at a profit. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God. 'And if one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave. As a hired servant and a sojourner he shall be with you and shall serve you until the Year of Jubilee."*

3rd - “your testimony amongst the other nations” – In other words you’re acting just like **Egypt of old (slavery).** Deut 7:6-8 - *"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."* Jesus said, **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”**

Key #3 - *A wise leader leads by example (v10-13)* - Paul writes in **Philippians 3:17-21** - *Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame -- who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the*

Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. **Maybe you need to change some ungodly habits - Heb 12:1-2 - Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.** Barnes writes, "As applied to Christians it means that they should remove all which would obstruct their progress in the Christian course. Thus, it is fair to apply it to whatever would be an impediment in our efforts to win the crown of life. It is not the same thing in all persons. In one it may be pride; in another vanity; in another worldliness; in another a violent and almost ungovernable temper; in another a corrupt imagination; in another a heavy, leaden, insensible heart; in another some improper and unholy attachment. Whatever it may be, we are exhorted to lay it aside, and this general direction may be applied to anything which prevents our making the highest possible attainment in the divine life." **Pray about your Christian life and make a list of your ungodly traits. Then ask God to forgive you, to help you change, and to be more like Jesus!**

Key #4 - A wise leader understands his accountability to God (v14-15) - Nehemiah had been governor of the region for twelve years and he did not take advantage of his position. Chuck Swindoll writes, "With every promotion there are privileges. New or added rights, benefits, and special favors are provided. The wise leader will use them without abusing them." In our news we have seen executive greed and financial irresponsibility through the abuses of Enron, WorldCom and others. However, for Nehemiah "*the fear of God*" kept his feet on the ground, his head on straight, and his vision unclouded. He did not suffer from an inflated ego, a demanding or controlling spirit, but rather a heart accountable to God.

Key #5 - A wise leader is one with the people (v16-18) - Notice that Nehemiah says, "I also continued the work on this wall." He saw himself as part of the team, a public servant, not an aristocrat. The laws and privileges of the government must be the same for the governed. Absolute fairness and equity are found in Jesus, Matt 11:28-30 - Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Key #6 - A wise leader prays (v19) - Nehemiah's courage to do the right thing in the midst of opposition was maintained through prayer. Prayer causes us to reflect and to respond. We examine our successes and failures, as we depend upon the grace of God to pull us through. Nehemiah's courageous battles were from without (Sanballat, Tobiah, and others) and from within (division and selfishness amongst his own people). Prayer was the rudder of stability that maintained Nehemiah's leadership in the midst of heavy storms. There's a story of a young man who was beginning his work with the Coast Guard and was called take part in a desperate assignment. A great storm had arisen, and a ship was signaling its distress. As the men began to move the big boat to the rescue, the young man, frightened at the fierceness of the gale, cried out to the captain, "We will never get back!" Above the storm the captain replied, "We don't have to come back but we do have to go out." **Prayer gives you the courage to do right thing at the right time in the right way. Let's be wise and courageous leaders moved through the power of prayer!**